Impostor

Volume 3, Issue 2 Fall/Winter 2023

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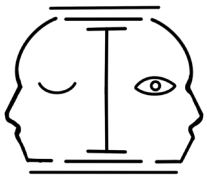
A Poetry Journal

Volume 3, Issue 2 • Fall/Winter 2023



Impostor: A Poetry Journal
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Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

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From the Editors

Welcome to the Fall/Winter issue of *Impostor*!

As we made our final decisions about submissions and began laying this issue out, common themes emerged amongst the work of our contributors: endings and beginnings, transformations from one state to another, the artificial made authentic, and cycles of change and repetition. The twenty-five poems herein seek to disentangle and express the processes of these experiences, whether with sorrow or joy.

The cover art chosen for this issue is a striking black-and-white image of tulips—licensed under Creative Commons and shared freely by photographer Chris Combe—that focuses on the myriad textures and shades of gray found in the tulips' petals. Compositionally, the flowers—traditionally pleasant and decorative—present a space crowded with petals and leaves just beginning to curl and wilt. The texture of the clouds behind the flowers presents the idea of open space as both claustrophobic and freeing, empty and full, moving between states of being.

We hope you, too, find meaning in these poems, and we thank you for reading.

See you in 2024,
L.M. and Coral

Our Mission

Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

Perhaps you've experienced it yourself—we certainly have! The literary world is rife with lofty and exclusionary definitions of what qualifies the title of "poet." When we decided to create this journal, we knew that first and foremost, we wanted to create a welcoming and encouraging space for writers who may feel intimidated by the established literary world or who feel as if their credentials—or lack thereof—don't fall in line with what's expected. We want your submissions regardless of your history; age, academic background, or the length of your curriculum vitae hold no influence on our view of what constitutes a poet. Your voice matters—we want to hear it!

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Boy Scout

Emily Bannigan

For the first time, today
I caught myself thinking
Never contact me again.
All in my head, for sure,
but as if I really meant it.
Like the Boy Scouts say:
Leave no trace. Pass by
and in passing, disappear.
Put the beloved pebble
back in the dirt, and know
that it will stay there. Then
carry on along the trails
and trust that, when you go,
the mountain will not care.

I Know A Gift When I See It

Fen Inman

and suddenly the scent of you seeps
through the roadside dust to warp
the golden ratio inside my head
beyond all recognition;

I'm eleven and unstoppable again, hands
on the ground, eyes
looking up the road both ways with
bare feet in the shoulder dirt here
where I shouldn't be, barked shins and
sheer animal delight

nothing fair about it—only excess, just the
honeysuckle that is the possibility of honeysuckle

The Frailty of Limbs

Amanda Hawk

I idolized the birds and how they flew free
from picket fence cages and invisible leash authority.
With nimble girl hands, I climbed
a silver storage container, the highest backyard peak

and stood on its edge.
Arms outstretched and eyes closed,
I wished for feathers and wings
instead of skin and skeleton.

When I jumped, my figure soared and sang
like the birds do, chirps whistling around my body,
then I heard the rattling earth.
My body transformed into a series of crashes,

then pain rocketed through my nerves
as I landed on tear-shocked ground.
I ran out the whimpers from my arms and legs,
and tried again and again to be free.

My mother witnessed me in flight
and seized my arm with a guard dog bite,
then shook away the bird's grace
from my appendages.

She dragged me to the corner of the yard
to show me a snap-necked bird lying in the dirt.
I focused on the flies around its empty eye sockets
and the maggots tucked in its wings.

My mother taught me the gravity of shattered birds.
She taught me fragility.
My nimble limbs became brittle that day,

and today,

I hear my skeleton crack
whenever I look up at the sky.

Poem Ending with a Line from Luc Besson's *Lucy*

Michael Dwayne Smith

Dad treasured Anne Murray's *Snowbird*, like to wore that record out until, during a case of Coors with a neighbor, he heard the double whammy: he'd been listening to a Canadian lesbian. He broke what he loved, threw it out. I wear jeans & a sportscoat to the service, no tie, pay the choir to sing *Snowbird*. My sister paints her nails during my eulogy. After, back at the house, store-bought potato salad, deli platter, neighbors & relatives chatter on anything but Dad, who hated hard, though me & Sis do not, us both excommunicated for relations with gays & not-whites, despite his Mexican buddy & drunk holiday habit of dancing around singing in one of Mom's dresses "as a joke." Always kept a dog to kick, yell at, lock outside at night, & muttered dark evangelical passages, trapped between the fool's gold of heaven & his seething lust… Sis thinks she had him figured. I did, too, for a time, us both kicked & locked out of home, but I've thought more about it since, parked by the river, under the cottonwood at night— truth is, we don't know any more than a dog who watches the moon.

a nap for two

Chaeli Kennedy

come resist a drop of routine
lay with me at noon
let the voile graze your back
as it filters the sun and
quilt yourself with rote lullabies
whose words we'll part like strands
of licorice coming undone for undone's sake.
some will droop into untold refrains,
others into the mouths of fish
whose candied scales glimmer
and dissolve in shuttered eyes,
phosphenes orange to empty black.

Beef

Joe Barca

I drive back from B.GOOD
with a veggie burger

and sweet potato fries.
Take a left at a green arrow.

A guy from
the other direction

takes a right on red
right after me.

Slams his horn.
The heat of his breath

on my bumper.
I swallow. I sweat.

A straightaway.
Oncoming traffic.

He can’t pass me.
A wolf in my rearview

flipping me off.
A side street. A right.

A left. He follows.
I pray.

Slow down.
I pull over.

He stops.
I lock my doors.

Unlock them.
Get out.

My hands open
like Jesus.

He approaches,
face aflame.

Cold-cocks me.
Bone, red, water.

A runner calls 911.
An ambulance.

Concussion, broken jaw, stitches.
My partner drives me home.

I sit on the couch. Look at my phone.
Another school shooting today.

Three Parsecs

Carmen A. Aiken

On a forklift I pretended I was in space, and I liked it, and
mostly liked a lot of the gig and pretending to be in space
because we hooked ourselves into picking machines, backing
into bins with the clamor you can hear in any galaxy
and given the ones with salaries did their jobs in the same
system we kept our alarms minimal to defer to them.
Until 6 or so when they left us alone. At the warehouse
I liked thinking about every washed up burnt out rabble-rousing
heart of gold hero clanging his ship into working
conditions, how we passed as forklift cargo transports in midair.
If the task was tedious the lights would go out and there was the high-up dark;
if you wanted to just sit for a minute; if your radio frequency scanner went out
over and over again because management thought a lack of wi-fi
would make a warehouse more productive; anything could happen.
Down another row someone would whirr and light up next to you,
beeping, everything beeping, beep: shit's in; beep: shit's slotted;
beep: shit's pulled; beep: shit's restocked; beep: shit's picked; beep:
shit's packed; beep: see you space cowboy. I liked pretending
because I knew space smugglers make a game of it too:
How fast can you run? How many treasures can you find?
In space, like a warehouse, no one can ever get ahead
and the wages of warehouses are not enough to make a life,
and in space it makes sense to hate your boss because
they think they're cutting you a deal they're giving you a break
they're outstretching that hand with the job and what an opportunity,
you should be thanking me. Stuck on earth now and why pretend
around the trite tales of metrics: 300 pieces of metal and plastic in 3 hours
without being paid to live, sent off boxes and boxes and boxes
of nylon and aluminum and desiccant without sick leave on a
twelve-hour shift. And still the bosses from out of the cave
they live, saying: *really, you can keep doing this all just the same*
you don't need to worry about six feet, about space to breathe.

I Hope I Had an Amazing Evening

Joseph Kerschbaum

I will never know if my extravagant meal at Fogo De Chão was worth the exorbitant price. After the feast, I treated myself and some of my closest accomplices to luxurious desserts and bountiful rounds of Chartreuse, Brandy, Port Wine, and other soothing digestifs. I hope we toasted to the sweet briefness of life and the stolen lives of others we were briefly living. I hope the forged affair was as carefree as a joyride in a hot-wired convertible on a gorgeous summer evening. Our rogue's dinner party absconded scot-free from the crime scene. After stealing my identity and parading around town like fake royalty with counterfeit courtesans in tow, the illegitimate version of myself left the real me holding the bag. The indifferent customer service representative says I must dispute the charges to clear my name. They need to forward me to another endless department. I am put on hold again. I am forever on hold. Just trying to hold on. Holding my breath. Holding back. Saxophone muzak drones on as I drift off. I can almost hear the background music drowned out by a chattering dinner party. Maybe I should plan a small gathering. Discover that forgotten version of myself, even if only for an evening. I don't know who I would invite anymore.

You know how I like a good rainstorm

Carmen Dukes

I am sitting at my desk
listening to winter rain
rattle achy windows
the water is inside now
all my buckets
filled to the brim
the gallery-white walls
are buckling
the snake plants in
their plastic pots
are floating
my feet are cold
I'll swim and find ya
I remember the way
because now the ink is
forming muddy puddles
on this gray-lined paper
and to be honest
I can't find a stamp
we can be like
the cormorants and snowy egrets
that huddle in the rain
birds of different feathers
and all that

see ya soon

into the earth

Ellen Miller

TEND
your body as if it were well-worn earth; letting the fine crumbs of dirt sift together.
Plant the seed of intention and water it well,
Soothing yourself, massaging your skin,
patting the fresh ground softly to nurture the seed.
They say that gardening is the deepest sign of hope,
to care for something vulnerable in the face of an uncertain tomorrow.
INTO THE EARTH
EMM

Tend your body as if it were well-worn earth; letting the fine crumbs of dirt sift together.
Plant the seed of intention and water it well,
Soothing yourself, massaging your skin,
patting the fresh ground softly to nurture the seed.
They say that gardening is the deepest sign of hope,
to care for something vulnerable in the face of an uncertain tomorrow.

{rain}

Beulah Vega

Have you ever crested the hill above Sausalito,
the bay mirroring the steely grey of a rainy winter
morning, and looking up, saw the fog on Mount
Tamalpais, forgetting it is too heavy to fly, lift
smoky tendrils, wisps of desire up to the clouds
above, only to dissolve, molecule by molecule
in the warming air, until nothing is left? That is how

your name tastes
in my mouth

Kingdom of Bats

Elizabeth Porter

The Spring bat count announces 141 emerging little browns. The bats launch from shagbark, from attics, from bat boxes over a glacial lake filled with envious trout, who now consider a census undertaking of their own. Overhead bats spiral beneath birds and their sun-lisped language. They lunge into sips of lakewater, mouths made dry from biding the sun's gentle tilt. We recount our tallies and miss the final annoyed cry of an owl, a catbird, our mothers while blurred darts pulse against blue-black, and we, the interlopers, hold tablets as in mythic pasts. Who tallies us, as we stumble to our cars, squinting into the forest? The sky is a deep moonless well and we are all wheeling sightless.

Reason No. 1001

Jack Mackey

For Brad

I hate waking up to a dishwasher
full of chaos you created last night—
moist sour air billowing out as I open
the latch & look for a clean coffee cup,
wine glasses lie horizontal, cloudy water
sloshing, dinner plates lined as close
as boot-campers, smelling the sweat
of the one in front, too close to ever
get clean, an artillery of cutlery dropped
carelessly—spoons pointing down, knives
aiming up, the melted Tupperware, victims
of a hot-air dry, expanding our carbon
footprint by inches each day. I unload
and reload, adding the detergent you forgot.

Then there's this morning when
I catch you standing in the front doorway
staring at a deer eating your roses.
An antler gone, blood across his ribs, no
doubt from a car, and your arm moves
to stop me from shooing him away. *Shhh!*
You say *He's hurt. Let him eat.* I'm reminded
of how you carried me home, wounded,
across your shoulders.

Like Water, Like Silk

Nicole Q. Nguyen

The northern wildfires cast
everything in a hazy orange glow
where we lay beyond the split rail fence
of the western pasture. The wind puckered our
skin, our backs wet from the tears of dew,
shoulders pressed together,
chins thrust toward heaven and
losing distant stars to the blur
of the ash hovering over the sweetgrass field.

We slept like dogs in the heat of that summer,
panting on the ground, spent and happy, ignorant
to the insurmountable grief
and unimaginable joy
that was to become of our lives.
Her fingers slipped into mine, her skin
wove intricate tapestries into my mind.
I held fast to that bittersweet nameless feeling
of missing something while I still had it,
as the last shimmering moments slipped
from us like water, like silk.

Somewhere between Mount Jackson and Rook
Creek, the A.C. blasting stale air into our faces,
our voices cutting in and out like the
humming static of the radio,
I decided I was not in love with her.
The force of her was a flood
crashing through the bastions that
I built to keep out the pain
and the pleasure and everything else.

The romance of our friendship drowned me
it was all-consuming, its depths
vast and incomprehensible.
The sun played tricks on our eyes,
turned the asphalt into an oil spill, slick with
heat. The miles of road stretched on and
        I showed her what I made ugly
        with time, with my body, with
myself and she held it anyway.
her hands spun it into silk,
spun it into salvation.

Home for Sale, In the Summer, After the Funeral

Kailie Foley

A 22-year-old says “I’ve never seen a bird die a natural death” as a sparrow tries to turn right-side up in the downpour. Its wings outstretched. The pavement empty of potential for flight. The Chicago train does not arrive for an hour.

The same 22-year-old holds a dead bird, losing the color green, in their hands years earlier, crying. Upset about the open windows. Now, the two birds in the cage cannot kiss. The wind whispers of natural death, expected taking. Now, I’m unsure just how much two is.

A man lays horizontally across the arms of a chair and says, “Thank you for helping me” twice. The second time is quieter. He closes his eyes. He, dressed in a full suit for work, not leaving, watches the crowd of people who came in the ambulance leave through his front door. He thinks he does not need to be hospitalized; he thinks he needs a vacation.

I walk around the neighborhood, not breathing. I am afraid of the sickness in your eyes and can tell no one how I feel because people are afraid of the sickness in my eyes just the same. I keep stopping on the sidewalk.

A woman stuffs her hair inside of a man’s hat to be able to cross the country freely and paints a love story, potentially by accident; a man looks over at a woman as she flees into greenery, and another woman holds her arm. It is hard to decipher just how many eyes bear heartbreak, just how many eyes bear freedom.

The house will be sold this summer because you are dead. My mother’s eyes console me after the news. She reassures me that there is time. There is no time. No time at all. No time to lay across the stains on your carpet. Sleep in your bed. Rip the wallpaper off of every wall. Keep the house forever. No time for you to breathe again.

On the lawn a headless bird rests, torn open, just its red flesh between two

present wings. “Get up,” I choose to say. “Get up,” I say. The bird is no longer on the lawn.

I look into your casket after lingering near the front door, only thinking about how I cannot avoid looking into your face as it is dead. You have never looked the way you do now, this calm and serious. They put on your glasses, so you could look more like yourself. You do not. You make do with silence.

Do I want my glasses on in my casket after my eyes have stopped and someone I do not know closes them for me? Can someone I know be the one to close my eyes? Or, they could be closed before this closing. I may need to divide time to decide what to wear to my funeral if I have one. Purple. That much I know. You wore purple.

You are dying. I am thinking about dying as you are dying; as you have dark purple bruises on your arms. You scream as they reposition you in bed. Three relatives stand in the corner of the room, eyeing each other in the heart of the noise. A mother and two grown grandchildren. You wore purple.

I think about how your hair stopped growing for good as you are buried in dirt; I shave off all of the hair on my body after not shaving for over a year. I cannot tell if I am further or closer to you as I do this. Further or closer to not living. Further or closer to myself.

I listen to your voice reading your poems as you are away, and I think about all of the roads to breathing that could potentially never be walked upon. I find it hard to address this. As soon as a heart beats attuned to my rhythm of heart there could be a lull in all music before the orchestra begins, as the crowd waits, not knowing the concert will never begin. So, I play your voice again. Curling up in the dark eye of a dream; thunder breaks. Is this music void of feeling? Can I craft an embrace out of silence if tomorrow sharpens into an unrequited state of existence, a togetherness that could never happen? Will anything ever move? Will time move so I can speak with you as I look into your eyes as we are both still alive?

I walk past a home where peonies grow and hands play the piano gently.

A man tells me I was meant to play the piano. We eat stracciatella together, pouring melted chocolate over the cold. He tells me he learned Spanish just to read the love letters other men were sending his wife when she returned from Spain. He and I both like when Frank sings All Or Nothing At All. He did not come to your funeral but you sat in the car with him listening to Frank; he told me. When your face was home to facial expressions you had unspoken thoughts about this man. Thoughts I can't know; I never asked for the thoughts.

I do not use my hands. Not to write him a letter about his changing my life. Not to play your piano after you are dead.

Black ants hurry to flood out of the center of a peony in the second backyard. The danger they sense is my movement. But they still flee when I stop moving. I cannot see anything but movement. I do not have my glasses on.

I Am Half (Mexico City)

Luna Arteaga-Laak

A living reverberation
of self.
All the mess
compiled into
one uncouth city.
A city of soul,
and heartache.
A city with roots.
My roots.
Old roots.
Worn-out boots
kind of roots.
Half.
Half and half.
Half brown half white.
Half *aquí y* half *allá*.
Half a disappointment.
Chinas. Curls.
Big hair.
Small mouth.
Few words.
I can feel their dissatisfaction
at my lack of vocabulary.
I want to say,
the night is enveloping.
Rain falls past
the street light.
I keep wondering who
is dying in this rain.
whose light is turning
off.
No more *hasta luego*.
I want to say
thank you to the
blooming orange

trees. Tell *mi abuelo*
I ate his
nopales salad.
But I can't say any
of that.
We do not
speak the same language.

First

Amber Wren

It's a 3-story walk-up, 1bd / 1ba. 500 sqft, an open kitchen / living room. It's 6.5 outlets. It's friends sleeping on the pull-out couch. It's classical music drifting on the breeze from the piano studio downstairs. It's climbing through my fourth-floor neighbor's window to get to the rooftop party. It's three bookshelves and counting. It's not counting the piles on the floor or the seventeen (!) books on the nightstand. It's *home is where the pants aren't* & #currentsituation & *mornings are so pretty here*. It's an oven too small for a standard-size cookie sheet. It's baking anyway, make a day of it. It's finding packages outside my door. It's neighbors who carry your mail up three flights of stairs to leave it at your door. It's playing the floor is lava in the bathroom, only it's winter & it's ice. It's four windows staring straight at a brick wall, one down to a cobblestone street. It's gazing at houses I can never afford in this lifetime. It's wondering why the fuck don't rich people use their roof decks? It's taking a bath, alternate boobs & knees. It's forty (?) houseplants fighting for space on the windowsills. It's *you either have a naked neighbor or you are the naked neighbor*. It's I am definitely the naked neighbor. It's the dog snoozing in the sunspot. It's roof puddles casting rainbows after rain. It's when I told my mother that I was moving out, she didn't talk to me for a week.

mom if you see this keep scrolling

KM Bezner

I don't let my mother read the poems I write
because if I do she'll ask me if I'm going to therapy
and I'll have to say no but I'm getting back on my meds
and we both know I've been getting back on my meds for a while
so instead she asks why I'm so sad and I have to say don't worry, these
are from then but I couldn't write them then so I'm writing them now
but we both know that then is a place that takes repeat visitors,
and sometimes even offers a real tempting discount and
it's so easy it's so easy it's so easy it's so easy
so it doesn't really help so I avoid the talk
she'd want to have if she read them
and I don't want her to worry
so in the end I just say
I'll call you when
I get home

pinker and pinker: survey of a Thursday

Scout Allen

here's what's on my mind:

1. typing this with the fingers of my left hand bandaged hardly working, hitting the wrong keys because I got poison ivy and in the night I scratched it real hard and it turned red and swollen and it's on my elbow and my face and now my right hand too because when the world is ending you still get poison ivy and it's spreading and it's spreading and when you poison the ivy it poisons you back I guess and I can't contain it and I can't help but admit that this might be a great place to watch the world end
2. the wind just spit a huge gust through the window and the sunflowers bent back and the orange kite neither curtain nor tapestry, flaccid between the windows, whipped back towards my face, and somewhere I heard a paper take flight
3. when they see me I'm pink, later even pinker, I am spotted flush and calamine, Benadryl and the ashy blush of a fading scar
4. jumping around, in my second-floor studio in a house held together with clever salvaging and a dream, prancing with my headphones on and gorilla-glue-hardened fingers, undoubtedly shaking dust down into the kitchen like when Sebastian used to rattle the house in its foundation with his thigh-high boots, twerking on the wall in the mornings
5. still thinking, about how apocalypse is a word I never spell right
6. that maybe wondering how to keep going is a way to keep going

Annunciation

Sophie Farthing

third bottle of wine
tree frogs calling in the pines
chilly black air between
the twinkle lights, jazz,
and Kate has pulled her hoodie
over her face.
Ian is all warm bones
garden smells
singing along to something
on his Lord of the Rings
playlist, cab sav breath
toasting my nose.
I hold Michael's shaky hand,
Michael stares into the dark
beyond the screens
probably seeing angels.
the cats curl up
on Kate's cold feet.

Ian got a smart ring
a painful (to me) ordeal
multiple packages shipped
tracked obsessively
measuring fitting testing.
"it tracks my sleep! it counts
my steps it records my
heart-rate!"
we are trying it out
on my pointer finger.
magic circle spell, will you
read my heart?
"you're shit at this!" Ian
yells at me

to see if my body,
barbecued over Baptist fires
will register the threat.
cackling, we watch the numbers
spike. I take deep breaths.
Ian smells like mint.

“Jesus,” says Michael
wide-eyed,
clinging to the horns
of the altar.

matricaria

Jess Ptak

730 each night, the yellow cup, a hot cloud bathing my face—i listen with my back turned, eyes wide, an old friend desperately seeking an existing thread, but i no longer wear sweaters or shirts she'd recognize; in fact, i've done away with fabric altogether. the skin holding my blood upright is tight enough to escape her grasp. at 8 i run my fingers through the elevator braille and squint my vision to see the walls as new acquaintances; the halls are dark and waiting, the city a temptation into the past. i'm a watcher. watchers pull up the stiff chair and reward themselves with self-imposed pity for the hard work of sleeplessness. watchers are motherless. no one outside of these rooms can understand the starvation of a dream. what's the difference between the starling singing and the measured edge of a body breathing? 730 each morning, the yellow cup, a hot cloud bathing my face—i listen.

Citrus and Cedarwood

Megan Frilling

I didn’t take much when we cleaned out your apartment:
A handful of photographs, the souvenir shot glass from our trip to Nashville,
And your favorite perfume. Citrus and cedarwood
And something floral I could never quite place. I used to spray it
On my pillow before bed every night,
But there are only a few spritzes left, so now
It collects dust on my nightstand. I’ve thought about buying another bottle,
But the label wouldn’t be peeling off
And it wouldn’t have a dented cap from when you dropped it
On the floor at Mari’s wedding.
So I can never bring myself to go through with it.

For Em

Sita Gaia

She asked me what I wanted for lunch &
in a snap I thought of rolls of yam and cucumber and smoked salmon.

Thank goodness we have the same palette,
as she was eager to devour the same feast.

I waved her over,
a smile so wide I needed my retro shades.

Pushing her walker filled with our lunch,
we tugged the long picnic blanket

of my extroverted dreams
under the shady tree of rest.

We opened the non-compostable,
non-recyclable styrofoam cartons of sushi.

Why did they get to sit in a landfill forever
while my friend's prognosis was uncertain?

The discomfort swirled around inside
like the flu about to lodge itself before the time

we got our flu shot together
when we first met.

The truth came slow, in small dribbles;
then burst like a fresh fire hydrant.

I could die, Sita.
Death had never struck me so hard

Like the midnight chime
of the grandfather clock in my friend's living room.

Her face crumpled under her straw hat;
I sat as composed as my iced coffee

on the dead grass.
Yanked the Social Work toolbox

from the back of my brain, gadgets falling
on my blue-grey checkered picnic blanket.

I picked one up. Hexagonal in shape
it tells me what to do:

I can't even imagine what
you're going through.

I grab the other gadget in my sweaty hand,
some sort of screw that if left missing

an entire shelf could collapse,
It whispers to me: *My god don't make it about you.*

She wiped her tears as I was desperate to,
but rules remained and I hugged

the bubble around us.
We laughed about her Corgi face mask,

& her crazy obsession with them,
how her brain tumor friend sent it to her

with no note. How could her fragile fingers
pick up her sushi with such grace?

My soy sauce was a river of rice;
my rolls fell apart as I tried to keep myself together.

We laughed delightedly over the confusion
of words mistaken behind masks.

I waved goodbye to her,
then crashed on my bed of dreams.

Scary ones. Silly ones, Amazing ones.
Buried my face in a burnt patch of dead grass.
This isn't even your life,
I whisper to no one.

The Red Thread

Elayna Mae Darcy

It moves lazily
through the circulating air—
two strands
that shine in the light,
soft raspberry sheen
snagged on a screw.

You are just a moment,
a lost thread
forever missing from
the tapestry of someone
I will never meet.

This is what being
a poet means—
to be, on a bus,
going somewhere,
listening deep
to the language around me,
even when I don't
understand the words.

My Hope

Paul Hostovsky

When I was very little
and closer to the ground
I spent a lot of time
on the floor. Sitting on the floor,
lying down on the floor,
crawling around on the floor
and playing with the cat
who was closer to the ground
than I was. I was
intimate with carpeting,
its smells, the soft scratch
of its nap on my cheek,
the faint stains, fallen crumbs,
chair legs, table legs, heat registers,
a dead fly, dried husk of a bee,
corners and baseboards. The older
and farther away I've grown
from the ground, the more I've forgotten
the view from down there.
Now I'm all up in my head
and the only time I get down on the floor
is to look for the remote,
or to play with the kids,
and also sometimes in the act
of making more kids. Grown-ups
mostly don't get down on the floor
if they can help it. But soon enough
we grow old, we fall down,
we have accidents, strokes,
heart attacks, and we find ourselves
suddenly on the floor again. My hope
is to open my eyes to the infinite
ingredients of dust, the endearing

dirt, the scuffed shoe, the imperfect
stitching of the welt, the loveable
ankles of the living.

Contributors

Carmen A. Aiken is a working writer born and living in Chicago. They graduated with a BA from Mills College in 2009 and enjoy live lit, having had pieces performed on Vocalo radio and at StoryClub Chicago.

Scout Allen is an emerging poet hailing from Appalachian North Carolina, with a background in ecology. Navigating the whimsy and horror of everyday life through examinations of the mundane and delighting in ephemerality, they mourn and rejoice in the world through the eyes of a queer Jew coming of age.

Luna Arteaga-Laak is currently living in Arcata, CA, and studying fine art and creative writing at Humboldt State University. She writes as a way to process and make sense of—or unmake sense of—the world around her.

Emily Bannigan is a writer and teacher from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Her poems can be found in *The Dawn Review*, *The Passionfruit Review*, and *Carolina Muse*. She is a graduate of Williams College and currently lives in South Korea.

Joe Barca is a poet from New England. He has a partner, two children, and a Wheaten Terrier named Brady. He is a fast talker and a slow runner. Some of his favorite poets are Mai Der Vang, Kevin Young, and Li-Young Lee.

KM Bezner (she/they) is a queer librarian in Rhode Island. Their work has been published by *HASH Journal*, *Hot Pot Magazine*, *Ouch! Collective*, *Barzakh*, *coalitionworks*, and others. If she's not writing poetry, she's probably reading comics or making zines. They can be found most places @kmbezner.

Elayna Mae Darcy (they/she) is a queer poet, filmmaker, and podcast producer. Elayna is the author of the *Unveil Me* poetry duology and the YA fantasy-verse novel, *Still the Stars*. They have also published short works with *Wizards in Space*, *just femme and dandy*, and *tiny wren lit*.

Carmen Dukes (she/her) is a writer, artist, lifelong student, and skateboarder who lives in Los Angeles. She spends her spare time admiring the magnificence of trees and watching egrets catch fish. She writes for two reasons. One, to stay off the internet, and two, to inspire others to create.

Sophie Farthing is a queer English teacher and emerging artist in Columbia, South Carolina, where she explores queer and religious trauma through poetry, miniatures, and fiber arts.

Kailie Foley is a nineteen-year-old poet from Illinois who loves to write about nature, mental health, and grief. Reading and writing poetry both help her with healing, and she hopes to convey her heart space through writing. She can often be found drinking a cup of tea.

Megan Frilling is a graduate of The Ohio State University and a current resident of Columbus, Ohio. She is a Taylor Swift enthusiast, green tea connoisseur, and lover of sandwiches in all forms. You can find her work in other journals, including *Livina Press* and *warning lines lit*.

Sita Gaia is a queer epilepsy warrior and neurodivergent poet. She has a chapbook published by Prolific Pulse Press, LLC (2021), *Knocking on the Body's Door*, which displays what it is like to live with epilepsy on a daily basis. She has also been published in *Kissing Dynamite*, among others. Follow her on Instagram @sitagaia_poetry.

Amanda Hawk lives in Seattle and splits her time with her son and friends and the city's neon lights. She has been featured in multiple journals including *Volney Road Review*, *Rogue Agent* and *the winnow magazine*. She released her first chapbook in 2023 called *Rain Stained City*.

Paul Hostovsky's poems appear and disappear simultaneously (*voila!*) and have recently been sighted in places where they pay you for your trouble with your own trouble doubled, and other people's troubles thrown in, which never seem to him as great as his troubles, though he tries not to compare.

Fen Inman studies ancient Greek and contemporary philosophies of perception, psychē, and nature. They sing when they want to, fight when necessary, and wander through the woods whenever possible.

Chaeli Kennedy is a writer and poet living in New York City.

Joseph Kerschbaum's most recent publications include *Midnight Sunrise* (Main Street Rag Press, 2024) and *Mirror Box* (Main Street Rag Press, 2020). His recent work has appeared in *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, and *The Inflectionist Review*. Joseph lives in Bloomington, Indiana, with his family.

Jack Mackey's poems have appeared in *Gargoyle*, *Broadkill Review*, *Panoply*, and other journals. His website may be found at www.jackmackeypoet.com.

Ellen Miller (she/her) is an interdisciplinary human based in South Philadelphia. As a dancer, she has performed in Philadelphia's renowned Fringe Festival. You can regularly find her checking out a new arts pop-up or wandering her neighborhood with a cup of coffee in hand.

Nicole Q. Nguyen is a Philadelphia native writer and academic. Her work attempts to reconcile the deeply confessional nature of art with her own unwavering love for storytelling. Nicole is proud to hail from a long, unbroken line of avid lovers of language. Find her on Instagram @NicoleQNguyen.

Elizabeth Porter teaches high school and explores the woods in south-central Pennsylvania. She is currently an MFA student at Lindenwood.

Jess Ptak writes prose-like poetry, seeking to integrate a sense of musicality with her natural curiosity for life, often writing in circles of questions and possibilities. Jess has an MFA in creative writing and loves to dismantle the formally taught rules of poetry in her teachings and day-to-day practices.

Michael Dwayne Smith haunts many literary houses, including *Gargoyle*, *Third Wednesday*, *Cortland Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *ONE ART*, *Chiron*

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Beulah Vega is a writer, poet, and theater artist living in Northern California. Her work has appeared in *Blood & Bourbon*, *Sage Cigarettes*, *Walled Women*, and *Jarden*, among others. She is still amazed when people refer to her as a writer—every time.

Amber Wren is a returning non-traditional student studying English and creative writing in the city of Philadelphia. They are passionate about queer art and literature, gardening, slow fashion, bees, and dessert. Find them most places @amberwrenwrites.

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Hailing from rural Western New York, **Coral O'Leary** is a lake-effect snow ex-pat, current New Yorker, queer poet, cultural worker, and asexual aromantic-spectrum lesbian. Her work has appeared in *Baby Teeth Journal*, *SORTES*, *Lavender Review*, *Lesbians Are Miracles*, and elsewhere. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2020 and Best of the Net in 2023. Coral can be found on Instagram @ohcoralpoetry or at www.coraloleary.com.

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